

PARSONS (R. L.)

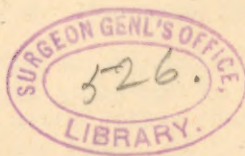
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Report of a Case of Acromegaly.

BY

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REPORT OF A CASE OF ACROMEGALY.¹

By DR. RALPH L. PARSONS.

A. B., the subject of this report, was born in 1858, is a native of Westchester County and has always resided in that county.

His father died at the age of eighty years. He was always a healthy man. His mother died at the age of sixty-two, of some disease of the kidneys. He has three brothers, one sister and two half-sisters. All of these are healthy people. No hereditary predisposition has been discovered.

During the first twenty years of his life the patient's health was uniformly good, with the exception of diseases peculiar to childhood, from which he recovered without sequelæ.

Eighteen years ago, while residing on a farm in the country, he had an attack of ague and fever, but there has been no recurrence of malarial symptoms since that occasion. He knows of no other cause that may have injured his health, unless he may have been overheated on one or more occasions about ten years ago while walking in the country. Has not been exposed to severe cold.

During his boyhood he lived on a farm, was then employed in a store, and for the past ten years has been employed as professional nurse.

Says he does not remember ever to have had sexual desire, although he did practice self-abuse when a boy. On rare occasions has erections at night, but for the past ten years is quite certain that he has had no sexual desire.

Has never had venereal disease. Has never used alcoholic stimulants.

Ten years ago he was told that he stooped and carried his head to one side. Eight years ago he began to suffer from a pain, or as he would rather characterize it, a distress in the back of his head. At first this occurred, for the most part, at night, and not oftener

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than once a week. The distress seemed to be within the head. He would awake with a sensation of distress and of being dazed, would rise, bathe his forehead and back of his head with cold water, get relief, and then sleep comfortably for the remainder of the night. This symptom increased in severity and frequency, and has continued until the present time, save as will be stated later on. Does not know of any cause for these headaches. He was occasionally constipated, but does not think he was especially constipated at the time of the occurrence of these headaches. Subsequently, they occurred by day more than at night. Latterly, they have continued, much of the time, during the forenoon, and have often been excruciating, almost unbearable in character. The distress, or pain, was usually most severe at the occiput, but would involve the left parietal and frontal regions. The right side of the head was unaffected.

About six years ago his attention was called to the large size of his hands. He then for the first time perceived that his hands were of extraordinary size. Does not know for how long a time this undue increase in the size of his hands had been taking place. He had never been in the habit of wearing gloves. Does not think that he now wears larger shoes than he did ten years ago. Cannot say whether or not there has been an increase during the past six years.

An examination of the patient was made on the 21st of October last and his physical condition and the objective and subjective signs and symptoms of disease were found to be as follows, to wit: Weight, two hundred and twenty-seven (227) pounds; heart and lungs seem to be sound, but for some time past the patient has had shortness of breath when climbing a hill or walking rapidly; temperature normal; after sitting quietly for an hour his pulsations were found to be from one hundred to one hundred and five per minute; appetite good, perhaps excessive; urine not examined, but there seemed to be some degree of polyuria.

Head.—Hair rather coarse, but natural in condition. Scalp healthy and free from dandruff. Left ear slightly thickened. Meatus of each ear normal; forehead retreating; superciliary ridges quite prominent; no exophthalmos; malar bones rather prominent; cheeks appear rather sunken; nose rather broad and full at the nostrils; lips normal; tongue decidedly enlarged, obstructing free articulation as though a foreign substance were

in the mouth; patient has himself observed this for the past two years; alveolar processes normal; teeth not separated; chin elongated, especially on the right side; head inclined strongly and habitually to the left side and forwards; patient says that he has carried his head in this way for the past ten years, and that he has a feeling of discomfort which is allied to pain when he does not hold his head in this position.

Upper Extremities.—The hands are large and spade-like, the right hand being decidedly the larger; fingers large and sausage-like, but the extremities are decidedly smaller than the middle phalanges; the soft tissues of the hands and fingers are firm, full and resilient, without pitting on pressure, as though infiltrated by an elastic substance; finger-nails appear small; sulci at the flexures of the hands and fingers rather deep; wrists appear to be rather large; arms normal; shoulder-large, but probably not abnormally so; left shoulder carried much lower than the right. The cubical content of the right hand about three weeks after the first examination was 600 c.c., of the left 603 c.c. The method of estimating the cubical contents of the hands was by means of water displacement, as follows, to wit: A quadrilateral opening was made in a thin board, the opening being large enough to admit the hand, one end of the opening being large enough to admit the turning of the wrist quite around and the other end too narrow to admit of such turning of the wrist. This piece of board was placed firmly on the wrist, as a clamp, by crowding the wrist far enough towards the narrow end of the opening; and then the hand was immersed into a beaker filled with water as far as the board would permit, the brim of the beaker having been first wetted. After the hand was removed, the displaced water was replaced and the quantity measured.

Thorax.—No abnormality of clavicles, sternum, or ribs noticed; marked kyphosis of the dorsum, with slighter scoliosis towards the left; lordosis slight, if any; heart sounds normal; pulse, on a repeated examination, one hundred; respiratory sounds slightly uneven or jerking.

Pelvis.—No abnormality observed.

Lower Extremities.—The feet are large, but perhaps not larger than in the case of many of his weight; but the tissues at the side of the foot near the heel, have the firm, resilient feel of the soft tissues of the hands.

Skin.—Has perspired very freely for the past ten years; and of late years the perspiration has been decidedly offensive, unless a special care was taken in his ablutions.

Pain.—Mention has already been made of the headaches. Has also suffered pain in the left ear; also in the left eye, especially after reading, or being in the sun. Consulted Dr. Webster two years ago on account of these pains, which it was supposed might have depended upon eye defects. Glasses were prescribed, but afforded no relief. The pains have been gradually becoming worse until quite recently; the headaches having often been excruciating in character and severity. Does not think his eyesight has ever been impaired, apart from the pain caused by use of the eyes.

Sleep.—Disturbed by the pain in the head during the night; but after bathing the head would sleep for the remainder of the night.

Senses.—Normal, save of the sight as mentioned.

Bowels.—Formerly constipated, but regular for the past three months.

Appetite.—Excellent, or excessive.

Thirst.—Excessive.

Mental Status.—Has not suffered from mental depression since a boy, when he was at times depressed in mind. Intellectual processes rather slow, but otherwise normal. Memory unimpaired, save when suffering from headaches.

Treatment.—On the 21st of October last, by advice of Dr. Starr, patient began the use of five drops, thrice daily, of an extract of sheep's thyroids. The medicine was kindly furnished by Dr. Crary. On the 4th of November, the dose was increased one drop; on the 11th of November, to ten drops, and on the 22d of November, to fifteen drops, thrice daily. This dose has been continued until the present date. With the exception of tonic baths, general hygienic measures, and some restrictions in and regulations of the diet, no other treatment has been advised.

Present Condition.—Patient reports that he has been feeling decidedly better since using the thyroid extract; that his sense of well-being in general has improved; that he feels more cheerful; that he has more confidence in himself; that he now sleeps soundly through the night; or, if he awakes, that he does not need to arise on account of pain or heat in the head, as

he formerly did ; that he can now read or write for considerable periods of time without causing pain in the head, or confusion of ideas ; and that his headaches have been relieved to a very great extent, although they have not entirely disappeared. While they formerly occurred every day, especially during the forenoon, and were excruciatingly severe, of late they have been quite bearable in character, and on some days he is altogether free from headache.

He has also improved in appearance and manner, but there seems to be no change in the dimensions of the hands. His weight has increased rather than diminished.

This case is of especial interest as bearing on the question of the usefulness of treatment by means of thyroid extracts. There can be no doubt that there has been great improvement in the subjective symptoms, but there may yet be a reasonable doubt whether the improvement depends more upon the direct action of the medicine, or upon the mental status induced by the fact that something is being done for the relief of the patient.

NOTE.—August 6, 1894. Under the continued use of the thyroid extracts, patient has experienced great relief from his headaches, his general condition has improved, and there appears to be a diminution of the acromegaly.

